



News Release

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Southwest Region (Arizona • New Mexico • Oklahoma • Texas)
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FIRE IN THE DEN

The southwest area of the San Andres National Wildlife Refuge will experience the mighty roar of fire during the Lion Den Canyon prescribed burn of 11,669 acres. Ignition will begin on April 27, 2006 – the wet winter of 2005 allowed for the completion of blacklining of the unit's perimeter, but caused postponement of the main burn until now. If all burn conditions are met, a helicopter will provide aerial ignition of the main unit. The area targeted for treatment contains common species of pinyon juniper shrub and desert grasslands.

At times, smoke and flames may be visible to the public, especially at night.

The refuge's active habitat management within the steep and rugged terrain of the San Andres Mountain range has been ongoing since 1997 to improve habitat for desert bighorn sheep, a New Mexico State listed endangered species. The San Andres bighorn sheep herd represents the largest of the herds in New Mexico.

The perimeter of the burn measures 21.8 miles. Parts of this burn are on White Sands Missile Range (WSMR), National Space and Administration (NASA) and Jornada Experimental Range lands. The Department of Defense (DOD) and Jornada are active participants in this habitat work on the San Andres.

The Lion Den Rx unit in the San Andres National Wildlife Refuge (Refuge) is located approximately 20 air miles east northeast of Las Cruces, 58 air miles south southeast of Truth or Consequences, 14 air miles west of White Sands National Monument, 33 air miles west southwest of Holloman Air Force Base, and 41 air miles west southwest of Alamogordo. The proposed burn unit is contiguous federal ownership. Refuge land managed by the US Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) is surrounded by White Sands Missile Range (WSMR) managed by DOD. The WSMR land in this area is a joint use area. The Jornada Experimental Range managed by the US Department of the Army and NASA both use the area.

Patrol and monitoring of the burn will ensue following ignition to check for hot spots and smoke and will continue until there is no reasonable chance for re-ignition. The

completed blackline and natural barriers of the burn area boundaries will provide further insurance against the possibility of fire spreading.

The burn is expected to restore habitat and increase the quality and quantity of forage for the refuge's desert bighorn sheep population as well as other species. Fuels reduction will prevent future catastrophic wildfires, help to protect archaeological and historic sites, reduce woody species such as pinyon and juniper, and increase native grasses ultimately decreasing soil erosion.

Members of the public having questions about the event may visit San Andres Refuge Headquarters located at Highway 70 and the northeast corner of Santa Gertrudis Road between mileposts 159 and 160, just to the east of Las Cruces.

MEDIA ADVISORY: *Because the burn site is within restricted military lands and the event is hazardous, access is limited. Media representatives wanting access must register with the White Sands Missile Range Public Affairs Office by calling 505-678-1134.*

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is the principal Federal agency responsible for conserving, protecting and enhancing fish, wildlife and plants and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. The Service manages the 95-million-acre National Wildlife Refuge System, which encompasses 545 national wildlife refuges, thousands of small wetlands and other special management areas. It also operates 69 national fish hatcheries, 64 fishery resources offices and 81 ecological services field stations. The agency enforces federal wildlife laws, administers the Endangered Species Act, manages migratory bird populations, restores nationally significant fisheries, conserves and restores wildlife habitat such as wetlands, and helps foreign and Native American tribal governments with their conservation efforts. It also oversees the Federal Assistance program, which distributes hundreds of millions of dollars in excise taxes on fishing and hunting equipment to state fish and wildlife agencies.

Visit the Service's website at <http://www.fws.gov>.